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Casey 'n' Sporkin, Sporkin 'n' Casey

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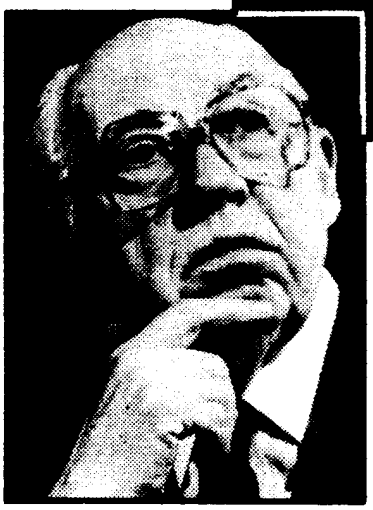
By JEFF GERTH
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 24 — Some ew them as an odd couple.

William J. Casey, 72 years old, is a ch conservative who often speaks in cryptic mumbles. Stanley Sporkin, 53, is a loquacious man of modest means and a more liberal bent.

But for all their seeming differences — Mr. Sporkin says one of the few things they have in common is a love of chess — the two men are close friends, the ideological and social fissures between them bridged over by a personal loyalty and respect developed through years of working together in public life.



The New York Times; Sygma/Diego Goldberg

Stanley Sporkin, right, general counsel for the C.I.A., and William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence.

For all their apparent differences, the two men are close friends.

Friendships Do Develop

Washington tends to polarize personalities, politics and power being what they are, but such friendships periodicially develop, and a right-wing Republican and leftwing Democrat might end up as drinking buddies or a labor lobbyist and corporate lawyer end up shunting business toward one another.

Thus it comes as no surprise to those familiar with the Casey-Sporkin friendship that Mr. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, is scheduled to appear at a closed hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee next week to testify in behalf of Mr. Sporkin, the C.I.A.'s general counsel, who has been nominated to be a Federal judge in the District of Columbia.

Mr. Casey normally does not get involved in a Washington issue such as the nomination of a judge. But this case is of special interest.

An Unusual Effort

When President Reagan nominated Mr. Sporkin 16 months ago, it was at Mr. Casey's urging.

And since then Mr. Casey has personally lobbied in behalf of Mr, Sporkin, an effort that one Administration official said was unheard of for Mr. Casey.

Alan B. Levenson, a senior partner at the law firm of Fulbright and Jaworski, who once worked at the Securities and Exchange Commission with Mr. Casey and Mr. Sporkin, described their relationship by saying: "It's really a matter of chemistry. Their mutual respect is for both the thinking and judgment of each other, which doesn't necessarily mean they agree."

Mr. Casey and Mr. Sporkin began developing a friendship back in the early 1970's at the S.E.C., where Mr. Casey was chairman and Mr. Sporkin was working in the enforcement division, investigating corporations, including some clients Mr. Casey had represented earlier while he was practicing law.

Later, when Mr. Casey went to the C.I.A., he took Mr. Sporkin with him.

"Their relationship shows how some deep bonds of respect can get forged when people work together in public life in this town," said one White House official.

On a Watergate-Era Matter

Whenever questions have arisen through the years about Mr. Casey's private business investments, his initial failure to put his assets into a blind trust or his conduct in government, Mr. Sporkin has been in the forefront of his defense.

It was Mr. Casey's judgment 13 years ago to heed Mr. Sporkin's advice on a Watergate-era matter that especially helped shape the Casey-Sporkin relationship.

Mr. Casey, as chairman of the S.E.C., had been asked by the Nixon White House to delay the questioning of Robert Vesco in a commission investigation.

Mr. Sporkin told Mr. Casey it would be inappropriate to postpone the testimony, and Mr. Casey took Mr. Sporkin's advice. The matter subsequently became an issue in the Watergate-related criminal trial of former Attorney General John Mitchell, in which he was acquitted.

"Whenever Casey had a problem, he could turn to Stanley," said Irwin M. Borowski, who worked at the S.E.C. with the two men and is now a partner in the Washington law firm of Shaughnessy, Borowski and Gagner.

Honesty and Creativity

"Casey wanted people who gave him honest good advice and who were creative," Mr. Borowski said. "Stanley was the epitome of that. That was the relationship. Out of that developed a tremendous personal feeling between the two."

In early 1981, when the Senate took up Mr. Casey's involvement in the Vesco case during his confirmation hearings for Director of Central Intelligence, Mr. Sporkin, still at the S.E.C., wrote a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee in behalf of Mr. Casey. In the letter Mr. Sporkin defended Mr. Casey's actions at the

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commission and praised him for aggressively pursuing the Vesco case, which resulted in charges of a huge financial fraud and led to Mr. Vesco's fleeing the country.

"As I reflect upon the Casey years at the commission, I can truly say they were some of the finest moments during my 19 years on the commission's staff," Mr. Sporkin wrote.

Several months later Mr. Casey chose Mr. Sporkin to be the intelligence agency's general counsel, even though he had had no experience in the field of national security or intelligence.

"One of the reasons he wanted me was that he didn't want somebody who would tell him what he wants to hear," Mr. Sporkin said.

"There's a tremendous loyalty going both ways," he said. "Casey knows his interests will be respected. We're very candid with each other. I give him my best advice. It's a magnificent relationship. It's almost a father-son relationship."

Mr. Sporkin's father was a a common pleas judge in Philadelphia. Mr. Casey, knowing Mr. Sporkin's longtime desire to emulate his father, recommended in 1984 that President Reagan nominate him to fill a Federal district court post in Washington.

A Convoluted Process

Because of questions from both Democratic and Republican senators about Mr. Sporkin's role in various C.I.A. activities, President Reagan has had to resubmit the nomination twice to the Senate.

A C.I.A. official said that one area of interest to be explored in the Senate hearing next week will be Mr. Sporkin's role in helping arrange legal counsel for a C.I.A. official suspected of leaking classified documents.

According to a White House official, the hearing, which had been scheduled today but was postponed, would probably be the last step in a convoluted and complicated nomination process that has lasted 16 months.

An official familiar with Mr. Sporkin's nomination compared the confirmation maneuvering to a chess game, an analogy that is not lost on Mr. Sporkin.

"We're both avid chess players, but we never play," he said of himself and Mr. Casey. "I think he's too good for me."

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